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STATEMENT AND RESOLUTIONS

of the National Convention of Christian Leaders
on the Plight of
Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin.

*Organised by the Joint Committee Of
The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) and the
Catholic Union of India (CUI) for Harijan Welfare and
The National Christian Council of India, (NCCI)*

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National Biblical Catechetical & Liturgical Centre
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Introduction:

1. We, Bishops, Members of Parliament and State Legislatures, Leaders of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin (CSCO) and other Christian Leaders representing various Churches and christian organisations from all over India, having participated in the National Convention of Christian Leaders on the Plight of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin (NCCL/P/CSCO), jointly organised by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), the Catholic Union of India (CUI) and the National Christian Council of India (NCCI) at the National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC), Bangalore, from June 15-19, 1978, wish to share, with all the churches, with all the people of India and with the Central and State governments, our experience of concern and resolve for social justice and liberation and uplift of the oppressed, with special reference to discrimination against Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin on the basis of religion.

An Historic Convention:

2. This Convention is indeed an historic one. Though efforts have been made in the past, it is the very first National Convention of all Christian Leaders, drawn from almost all parts of our country, and from most of the churches of India, together with the associations of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin at various levels and other Christian Associations, on the Plight of Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin. This has been a National, ecumenical and united effort marked with intense fellowship and unity in the spirit of Christ, with one common goal of securing justice to the oppressed.

An awakening experience:

3. Sharing of experiences, prayerful study and reflection, and analysis of the Indian reality made us all deeply aware of, and sensitive to, the injustice that is built into the systems and structures of Indian Society.

4. The perpetration of oppression and exploitation and the consequent marginalisation of the weaker sections of our people, particularly those of the Christians of Scheduled Caste Origin has caused deep concern and anguish in our hearts.

The Four-day Programme:

5. The Convention unfolded itself in a four-day programme. The first day was spent in analysing and interpreting the factors and forces at work in the social, economic and political structures of the Indian society. A study and consolidated report of the last thirty years' struggle revealed the legal and political factors behind the Governments' objections and refusals to the previous representations.

The expert legal opinion made available to the house on the relevant articles of the Constitution and the presence of and sharing by two members and secretary of the Minorities Commission gave clarity on several issues and much hope for the future. The sharp theological reflection on the issue further enhanced our awareness and determination.

PART I: FOLLOW-UP ACTION

Justice in the Churches:

6. Much time was devoted to discussing in groups the follow-up action to be undertaken by Christians and Church bodies so that justice may be rendered to CSCO both **within the Church** and outside.

a) Removing all forms of segregation, encouraging children to make friends with children of CSCO, promoting social gatherings and community meals in the houses of CSCO, inter-caste marriages, and inter-caste volunteering of God-fathers were some of the suggestions.

b) Adequate representation is to be given to CSCO in the parish councils and other church committees and reservation is to be made to them in christian institutions for admissions and appointments, and in allocation of church funds. Efforts should be made to remove the sense of inferiority and helplessness caused by economic, social, educational and other backwardness. More boys and girls from CSCO should be encouraged to join the seminaries and convents and more positions of responsibility given to them.

Educating the Churches:

7. For all this a process of educating christians and mobilising leadership from CSCO is indispensable.

a) Through posters, articles to magazines, newsletters, meetings and rallies, study circles and methods of non-formal education, circular letters, and religious instruction, Christians have to be made aware of the injustice done to CSCO and to be involved in action. Animators and leaders preferably from CSCO have to be identified and trained for this purpose.

b) The need of taking sides with the poor and the oppressed must be brought home to the evangelical workers and the clergy. Removing social inequality and injustice and promoting understanding and brotherhood should be the frequent theme of prayer services and sermons. One day in a year could be celebrated as Sunday for social justice to CSCO. Aids could be provided for meaningfully celebrating this Sunday.

c) Above all, ways and means should immediately be devised and steps taken for removal of any discrimination against CSCO within the Church so that the Church may show the way to the country in creating a casteless society and may have the moral courage to fight with the government for the rights of CSCO.

United Front for justice in society:

8. Our deliberations have convinced us more than ever that denial by the government of the benefits to those of Scheduled Caste Origin who have converted to Christianity and other religions of the Minority Communities is a clear case of discrimination and injustice perpetrated against them on the basis of religion

and is therefore a flagrant violation of the Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the secular character of our Republic. This, therefore, is not a communal issue. It is a human problem and is directly connected with justice for all and for each section of the population. The whole Church is called to rally round this common cause to launch a united front of action.

9. The support of the general public, political leaders and other minority groups is also to be solicited by informing them of this problem through mass media of communication and personal contacts.

10. Both at national and regional levels this case has to be effectively presented to the various forums available like the Minorities Commission by supplying concrete cases of discrimination, with facts and figures. Serious efforts should be made to collect such data.

11. Every form of massive representation to the Government through postcard, telegramme, memoranda campaigns, deputations of MPs, MLAs, MLCs, prominent political and religious leaders to the President of India and the Prime Minister should be resorted to at a national level.

12. Direct action both at regional and national levels like processions and dharnas, strikes and closure of christian institutions, picketing, fasting and hunger strike and boycott of elections may not be ruled out as a final resort.

PART II: RESOLUTIONS

In order to effectively carry out the above recommendations

13. (i) it is resolved that a **Follow-up Action committee** be forthwith set-up with due representation being ensured to the CSCO in the Committee.
- (ii) that this Committee be responsible for the implementation of the resolutions and recommendations of the Convention.
14. (i) the sponsors of the Convention shall move their regional/State units to establish follow-up action committee at the regional/State levels at the earliest date.

- (ii) that the regional/State committees plan and hold a convention on a regional/state level within six months. That the national Follow-up Committee assist them in the matter:

15. that a Social Justice Sunday be observed in every parish on a common day highlighting the plight of CSCO, as part of a sustained programme of conscientization of all sections of people in this regard. The Follow-up Action Committee will fix the Sunday and prepare the necessary materials and circulate them to the Churches.

16. that the Follow-up Committee present a new type of memoranda to the President, the Prime Minister, the Union Home Minister, State Chief Ministers and to the Minorities Commission as early as possible highlighting the discrimination and injustice against CSCO and deal with the Central and State Governments in whatever ways necessary for the redressal of the grievances.

17. that the Follow-up Committee should contact all the MPs and enlist their support for any bill coming up before the Parliament for the amendment of para 3 of the President's Order to remove the discrimination on the basis of religion.

18. (i) that the Follow-up Action Committee be authorised to take such steps as are necessary for the setting up of committees by the Churches for enquiring into the discrimination and ending injustice against CSCO in the Churches and in Society. That this be done within a period of six months.

(ii) it is recommended that in the Church related institutions, an adequate quota of admissions and appointments be reserved for CSCO.

(iii) that every effort be made by ecclesiastical heads to encourage vocations to the priesthood and religious life and other leadership from among the CSCO.

19. that this convention wholeheartedly support the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Orders (Amendment Bill, 1977) introduced in the Parliament by Mr. G.S. Reddi on 1st October 1977.

CONCLUSION:

20. This Convention has deepened our concern for justice and our sense of mission for the liberation of the oppressed. We realise that our fidelity to Jesus Christ, the liberator will be only in the measure in which we are instruments in bringing about a new order of society, based on the gospel values of justice, freedom and love.

21. This leaves us no other option but to start a more intensified struggle however hard and prolonged it may be for the eradication of discrimination against CSCO as the first step in the realisation of the larger objective of a just society. This struggle of ours is a patriotic service to our country for the preservation of its secular character and for promotion of the lofty ideals enshrined in our constitution. It is a struggle that we shall wage in collaboration with all men of good will, irrespective of caste and creed.

22. We commit ourselves to this task placing all our trust in the Lord and in the guidance and strength of His Spirit. Sharing in the mission of the Lord we have the courage to proclaim: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon (us)...He has sent (us) to proclaim liberty to captives... to set free the oppressed"...(Luke 4:18).

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